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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002353

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [OSCE](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: DIFFICULTIES FROM PARLIAMENT'S HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

REF: A. ANKARA 549

[1](#)B. ANKARA 808

Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter; reasons 1.5 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Trouble continues with ruling AK party parliamentary Human Rights Committee Chairman Elkatmis regarding Iraq-related anti-American statements he persists in making to the press, statements which (1) are at odds with the AK government line; (2) reflect the committee's refusal to tackle domestic human rights issues; and (3) demonstrate strains within AK party. End Summary.

Charges of "Massacre"

[1](#)2. (C) April 4 we called on Mehmet Elkatmis, an AK Party M.P. and Chairman of Parliament's Human Rights Committee, to discuss recent articles attributing anti-American statements to him. Elkatmis confirmed he had responded to reporters' questions by saying U.S. and UK leaders "could be" brought before a war crimes court for their role in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the conflict in Iraq is not war but "savagery" and a "massacre." Defending his comments at length but in an unfocused fashion, Elkatmis charged that Iraqi civilians have been killed and missiles had landed on Turkish soil during the conflict. "One bombing of a marketplace might be a mistake," he said, "but four or five?"

Post Rebuttal

[1](#)3. (C) We emphasized the considerable lengths Coalition forces have gone to in order to avoid civilian casualties. Did Elkatmis, by using the word "massacre" (katliam), mean to charge Coalition forces with having deliberately targeted civilians? Elkatmis refused to give a straight answer. In noting that the U.S. respects the right of anyone freely to express his views, we then underscored that (1) we take words seriously, particularly when they come from a senior M.P.; and (2) such statements -- which Elkatmis volunteered were based in part on regional TV reporting -- do a disservice to USG-GOT and USG-AK relations.

[1](#)4. (C) We noted that on the same day Elkatmis' comments appeared in the press, FM Gul was quoted as saying Turkey is "part of the Coalition." PM Erdogan also recently placed a column in the Wall Street Journal emphasizing the importance of Turkey's alliance with the U.S. Elkatmis' comments thus appeared to contradict the policies of the AK party and government. Moreover, Elkatmis is not the head of an independent NGO but rather a prominent M.P. His public statements consistently focus on supposed human rights problems in other countries, rather than in Turkey. How should the USG interpret this approach? In a meandering response, Elkatmis claimed to support Turkey's alliance with the U.S., but argued that as Human Rights Committee Chairman he speaks in defense of human rights around the world, not as an AK or GOT representative.

Unhappy Camper

[1](#)5. (C) April 9 "Sabah" daily published an account of the meeting in which Elkatmis distorted both the spirit and content of the exchange. In response to our subsequent expressions of regret that Elkatmis had misrepresented the meeting, senior AK officials observed to us that Elkatmis has been a growing problem for the party and that he would be

"warned." AK Deputy Chairman for Public Relations Mercan called April 10 to offer apologies, and said the party has asked Elkatmis to make his own personal apology.

Comment

16. (C) Elkatmis, an Embassy contact since 1996 and member of the more hard-core Islamist tendency in AK, has been a useful interlocutor in the past. However, this misstep, and a previous attempt by him to contribute to a smear campaign alleging USG support for the PKK (ref A), reflect the generally low quality and still embryonic understanding of democratic institutions shared by Elkatmis and other members of the Human Rights Committee. In this context, we note that Elkatmis and other Committee members: (1) profess to believe that the Committee's work is somehow unconnected to the wider traffic of parliamentary activity and USG-GOT relations -- despite their own sensitivities about U.S. Congressional attitudes towards Turkey; and (2) appear to derive considerable inspiration from fiery Speaker of Parliament Bulent Arinc, who has made no secret of his ambitions to challenge Erdogan for leadership of AK (ref B).

PEARSON